



## **From Limitation to Innovation | Vashkar Bhattacharjee**

### **TEDxGulshan | 4 November 3032**

Do you know why I ask this clap? Because I am one who is VIP. Oh, no, no, no, I'm not that VIP, I am visually impaired person. I'm not seeing you or anyone. Can you see me? Sure. If you would like to feel my struggle, if you understand my journey. If you truly understand my innovation, you need to replace myself in my positions.

I am requesting you, please close your eyes for five seconds. What do you feel? It is not full of darkness. I have no meaning of color. I have no meaning of light. I have born blind, and grown up within that.

Thank you. Thank you for your patience.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am one who have born in a rural village of Chittagong, where no doctor, no hospital.

Eventually, I have lost my eyesight. In my two years of age, my family first realized their baby boy, whose name is Vashkar, means sunlight, has no light in his eyes. My parents have lost all of their hope and dreams. It was a disaster, when they know their baby boy is blind and can't see forever.

They have tried their best to provide me education. I can remember the days, when my mother, when I touch her face, I always felt my mother's face is full of salty water. Later, I realized my mother was crying silently because of my situations.

Ladies and gentlemen, my family and myself have two options. One, begging in the street. Two, by, at any cost, to getting education. My family has tried hard to provide me

education. I entered in a local school, and it was nearly impossible for me to get education. In my entire life, I always listen a word that is, No, no, you can't, you don't, you are unable to do, but me and my family never ever stop.

Fortunately, we got a information regarding a special school for the blind and have entered there. This is a primary school. First I have learned about the braille. Still, there is no technology, no accessible books, but very kind teachers who have tried level best provide education to me.

After completing primary education, another struggle has started. No schools has allow us to enter many streaming schools, high schools. All say no.

I was appear secondary certificate exam. In that time, it was says, matric exam, in private. That means without going in any schools. I was appear in exam. Without reading a single book, I appear in exam.

\Colleagues, I was one who is almost excluded from the education. Today, you will be very glad to know, my life and life story is the part of textbook. Is it not amazing?

After completing my secondary exam, I was trying to enter in a college. Again, there is a struggle. Same situations I have faced, but this time able to join in a college, after completion of the higher secondary exam.

You have questions in your mind, I know. How we are appearing in exam? In exam, someone write for us who is junior than us, two years juniors than us. When we say something, they are writing. It's called 'scribe' '

However, after passing the ASC exam, we tried to enter in university. University authority said, No, we are not ready to welcome you. Our campus is not for you. We, some of the friends, has started hunger strike. Eventually, again, university allowed us to enter.

But, I want to study social science. They say, No, you are not eligible for social science because they have the field work. You can read history.

However, I just go for studying history. Again, there is no books, no technology, no awareness, full of barriers around me. I can share one experience. One day, I was taking notes by Braille select. My teacher thought I'm playing in his class. He told me, stand up and get out from my class. You are playing in my class. I was in first year. I was very emotional. I can't stop my tears. After one hour, I went to his room and I showed that I have taken notes in braille. My teacher was amazed and surprised. That's the day we had passed.

Colleagues, the university who say no to me, today, I am leading to make that university model inclusive university in the country.

The turning point of my life, I got a rare opportunity to go to Japan for a one year Duskin leadership training. That was the turning point in my life.

First, I have realized that I have something to do. My dream became bigger. First, I have learned technology. First, I have learned the meaning of life.

Immediately after completing my training in Japan, I have returned to the country. I thought I have now enough. I have a computer. I have a phone with connectivity. I have knowledge. I know how to survive.

But, a new journey has started. One year I was struggling to get a job. Nobody believed that I could do something. Only one word, you are blind. You can't do that. Who will help you? You are not eligible for the job.

But I never, ever stopped. Believe me, I never get anything by once. I tried, tried, and tried.

I have started work as a volunteer. One local NGO called YPSA has given me opportunity to work with them, and my new journey has started, and I got a stair to climb.

I have established country's first disability innovation center there. Thousands of youth with disabilities train there. As I already told you, I didn't get a single book for my reading. I have started producing accessible books, braille, audio, etc.

Another new opportunity came in front of me when there is a Digital Bangladesh initiative has announced. There is a special program, innovative program was there under the Prime Minister's office called A2I. I have started work with them as a volunteer, started work with them as an innovator, started work with them as a professional, and create awareness. regarding inclusion and accessibility to ensure equal rights for all, including people with disabilities.

I can remember when my daughter, she was in class one, and she bring her printed books to me. Again and again, she asked me to read the books. I always say, no, I cannot read. I can't see. My daughter never realized her father is blind. I always tell her, please go to your mom. She always asked me, and request me to read her book.

Then I thought if I could innovate something, which I may read by listening, my daughter can read by seeing. The idea came that is multimedia talking book. With the support of A2I, I have innovated multimedia talking book, and that is award winning books.

I tasked the dictionary, the printed dictionary of Bangladesh, Bangla Academy.

It's mail. I never thought I can use that. Today, I have innovated a dictionary which is accessible for all, including yourself, online, offline, this is available. I have ensured digital public infrastructure must be inclusive and accessible for all, including people with disabilities.

I believe... there is many awards and recognitions we have received, the meaningful one is the people's love. When parents come to us, when parents came to my mom, and we can inspire them.

We always say, they say, we are able to, we solve one problem, that is the reading problem for the people with disabilities. Today, each of the students get accessible book in the beginning of the educational year. That is one of the biggest achievement of my work.

Friends, colleagues, believe me, this is not my individual work. This is of my colleagues from A2I, colleagues from YPSHA. I am again requesting you, still we need to go long, still we need to change this world. We need to work for an inclusive world, where everyone can enjoy equal basis with others.

Again, I am requesting you, please close your eyes and sing a song with me, that is, we shall overcome.

Everyone.

[sings] We shall overcome.

We shall overcome, some days.

Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe

that we shall overcome, some days.

Let's work for an inclusive world.

Thank you very much. Thank you.